

Angelo Messore
Manchester Community College
Testimony to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement
Committee
February 15, 2023

Representative Haddad, Senator Slap, distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, good evening.

My name is Angelo Messore, and I am a professor of political science and economics at Manchester Community College.

I come before you this evening to request that you increase funding for Connecticut's community colleges in the state's biennial budget.

I have been teaching at Manchester Community College for 36 years now and am well acquainted with the workings of the Connecticut community college system and the challenges facing community college students in our state.

After Mr. Mark Ojakian was appointed to serve as President of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities in September of 2015, he came to speak at Manchester Community College. In his speech he explained that the community college system, as it was then configured, was not viable because it was too expensive. He told us that he needed to cut the budget of the community colleges by \$28 million or almost 20% (out of what was then a budget of around \$153 million, exclusive of employee fringe benefits cost). Since 2008, the budget of the community colleges had been continuously reduced. At the time President Ojakian made this announcement, I remember thinking, a cut of 20% would surely cripple the entire system. To solve the budgetary problems of the community colleges, President Ojakian proposed a consolidation of the entire system, arguing that such a change would

lead to substantial cost savings. From the very beginning, the purpose of consolidation was to save money and not to improve the education of students. Interestingly, there was a suspension of budget cutting in 2020 as the state received a substantial infusion of Covid relief funds from the federal government.

Now that the pandemic has subsided and state revenues have attained a healthy level, it would make sense to restore funding to the community colleges.

Over the past few years, many faculty and staff have retired. It is important for us fill these vacant positions. Without faculty and staff on campus to work directly with students, we cannot provide a high-quality educational experience. Before the pandemic, budget cuts forced our then college president to cancel the athletics program. Manchester Community College used to have soccer and baseball teams that attracted around 300 students each year. Losing the athletics programs has contributed to the decline in the college's enrollments. The athletics programs were not expensive, they attracted students, and promoted college spirit. For many students, athletics programs provide a strong incentive to attend college.

A long-standing inequity in our CSCU system is the denial of health care benefits to PT faculty and staff. If the state of Connecticut is sincere in its commitment to equity and social justice, it should provide health care benefits to part-time employees. Sadly, lack of health insurance can devastate a person's life

To its credit, the Connecticut General Assembly established the PACT program in 2019 to provide free tuition to students attending community colleges. I have a significant number of students who begin their college careers at MCC and then transfer to the University of Connecticut to complete their bachelor's degrees. Thanks to the PACT

program, they are able to substantially reduce the cost of their college educations. This is a significant help for middle class families struggling to get their kids through college. I urge you to expand funding for the PACT program. As more families learn about it, more students will want to use it. This program may well bring more students to the community colleges.

Students who attend the community colleges and the state universities do not come from affluent families. Most work their way through college. Tuition increases impose a significant burden on them. I urge you to oppose tuition increases. With inflationary pressures throughout the economy, tuition increases would just create greater hardship. A few weeks ago, I was speaking to one of my students. He told me that he hated taking online courses, so I asked him why he wasn't taking courses on-ground. He answered that he didn't have a car and couldn't drive to campus. Automobiles are expensive and so are gasoline and auto insurance. Without a cheap, reliable car, it's difficult for our students to get to campus. When you add a tuition increase to increasing prices throughout the economy, you just add to the hardships that our students face.

I hope you will keep in mind the challenges that community colleges face and the valuable work that they do.

Thank you for your time.